

He plans reunions for fun and profit

You may meet Larry Neichter at your next high school reunion and wonder, "Which kid was he?"

"I'll probably average going to about 20 reunions a year," said Neichter, 42, who is president of a suburban Louisville company called Class Reunions Plus. A 1974 graduate of Jefferson County's



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Ballard High School, Neichter has earned his living since 1987 by organizing high school reunions. He got the idea from an item in Money magazine.

"I had been working as a journalist, and I guess I had probably chased one firetruck too many," said Neichter, who has a journalism degree from Ohio University. He found a man in Detroit who taught him how reunions are done.

For 11 years, Neichter has been walking 25 feet to work each morning — from his bedroom in eastern Jefferson County to his office down the hall. His wife, Betsy, a teacher, often helps out.



Neichter

Neichter is a private detective, reporter, program planner, psychologist, waiter, disc jockey, chaperon and bouncer.

His company handles all the details: research, mailings, facilities, food, entertainment and clean-up. Fees vary with each event.

"I've met individuals who did a tremendous job on their own reunions, but the down side is that they are usually so tired of it by the time it comes around that they don't even enjoy themselves," Neichter said. "I only do high school reunions. I get approached all the time about military and family reunions, but they are a different genre."

Among the many things Neichter has observed about class reunions:

■ Almost everyone is nervous until seeing that first familiar face.

■ All anyone really wants to do at a class reunion is talk to classmates, with maybe a little music for background and dancing.

■ There is more pretentiousness at a 10-year reunion than at later reunions. "By the 25th-year reunion, they don't care if you're fat, thin, have your hair or not, or whether you show up in your underwear; they're just glad to see you."

■ A person who lives far away is a little more likely to come back than someone who still lives just across the street from the school.

■ Everybody remembers things differently. "I always say that we see people that we have forgotten that we forgot. I know at my own reunions — which I do go to — there'll be a really cute girl run up and give me a hug, and I won't have a clue who she is. Then I'll try to say 'Hi' to somebody that I remember as a great friend and they won't have a clue who I am."

■ Class officers often don't go to reunions. "I think it's because they believe people expect more of them ... and if they don't end up achieving every goal they set out to achieve, I think they're afraid people will think badly of them."

■ Class members from small schools are much more likely to attend reunions than those from larger schools. "The national average attendance ... is 1 out of every 3 people that you find. Smaller classes may get 2 out of 3."

Neichter once found a young man who had changed his name and was an opera singer living in Italy; he came back for a Pleasure Ridge Park High School reunion. In another instance, Neichter located a Navy SEAL who was able to get leave from submarine duty in the Pacific for his reunion.

"Occasionally I'll call someone and they'll say: 'I don't know how you found me. Please don't tell anyone where I am,'" Neichter said.

Byron Crawford's column appears on the Metro page Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. To contact him, call 582-4791.